

# *Liberated Reformed Church at Abbotsford*

C/O 2043 Jordan Place, Abbotsford, B.C., V3G 2C3

March 14, 2019

General Synod Edmonton 2019  
of the Canadian Reformed Churches  
C/O Canadian Reformed Church at Edmonton-Immanuel  
21112 35 Avenue N.W.  
Edmonton, Alberta  
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Esteemed delegates:

**Re: Appeal of Article 53 of the Acts of General Synod Dunnville 2016  
Appeal of Article 62 of the Acts of General Synod Carman West 2013**

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We hereby appeal Article 53 of the Acts of General Synod Dunnville 2016 and Article 62 of the Acts of General Synod Carman West 2013, on the basis that these Articles do not consider decisions of previous General Synods and conflict with the Word of God and the Church Order, as follows:

## **Observations**

1. Both Article 53 of the Acts of General Synod Dunnville 2016 and Article 62 of the Acts of General Synod Carman West 2013 declared our letters inadmissible.
2. The reason given for both of these declarations is found in Article 53 of General Synod 2016 under "Admissibility 2.1" as follows: "GS 2013 (Art. 62) declared their letter inadmissible. GS 2013 observed, "The churches of the Canadian Reformed federation set the agenda for general synod. No church has asked us to address this issue. Synod also accepts correspondence received from churches with which we are in Ecclesiastical Fellowship. The letter from the LRCA does not fulfil either criterion." GS 2016 agrees with GS 2013's observation."

## **Considerations**

- 1) The assertion that it is only the churches that set the agenda of a general synod is contrary to the Church Order. Article 31 specifies who has the right of appeal when it states that "If anyone complains that he has been wronged by the decision of a minor assembly, he shall have the right of

*appeal to the major assembly; and whatever may be agreed upon by a majority vote shall be considered settled and binding, unless it is proved to be in conflict with the Word of God or with the Church Order.” Anyone whose life has been touched by a decision of an ecclesiastical assembly, in a federation which governs itself by this Article, “shall have the right of appeal to the major assembly....”*

- 2) More importantly, the assertion that it is only the churches that set the agenda of a general synod is contrary to what we confess Scripture teaches. As we confess in Article 32 of the Belgic Confession, “*We believe that, although it is useful and good for those who govern the church to establish a certain order to maintain the body of the church, they must at all times watch that they do not deviate from what Christ, our only Master, has commanded. Therefore we reject all human inventions and laws introduced into the worship of God which bind and compel the consciences in any way. We accept only what is proper to preserve and promote harmony and unity and to keep all in obedience to God.*”
- 3) The General Synod decisions we have appealed in our previous submissions to General Synods 2013 and 2016, when accepted by the consistories, bind the members of the church to an unscriptural unity with those who do not maintain the reformed confessions. As a result these General Synod decisions have upset the ecclesiastical order of the church which has been established by Christ. In the words of General Synod Fergus 1998, not only did the decision recorded in Article 45 of the Acts of General Synod Neerlandia 2001 to extend ecclesiastical fellowship to the OPC “*not help the Orthodox Presbyterian Church to function in a manner that is suitable to one of the churches of the Reformation*” (see Acts of Synod 1998, Article 130, Consideration C.2), but it did not help the CanRCs to function in a manner that is suitable to one of the churches of the Reformation either.
- 4) At General Synod 2013 a minority of delegates expressed the thought that the matters we had appealed were not worth seceding over and therefore we should return to the CanRC. To support their point this minority made the claim that “*in their internal conduct as well as in their inter-church relations, the Canadian Reformed Churches have reflected the thinking of John Calvin penned more than 400 years ago,*” and then provided an extensive quotation from his Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book IV, Section 1.12. (see Acts, Synod 2013, Article 62, DEFEATED consideration 4.3). Even though this consideration was defeated and did not form part of Synod’s decision, we interact with this quotation as follows:
  - a) The quotation predates the Synod of Dort which had determined that Scriptural unity was defined by profession of the Reformed faith and the leading of a godly life (see Article 61 of the Church Order). From the date of the institution of the CanRCs the Word of God as

summarized in the Three Forms of Unity and as applied in the Church Order of Dort formed the bond that held the CanRCs together. However when Synod 1992 and Synod 2001 made decisions entering into ecclesiastical fellowship with churches that do not maintain the reformed confessions, this bond began to break.

- b) The quotation from Calvin refers to two marks of the church – the pure preaching of the gospel and the pure administration of the sacraments. However Article 29 of the Belgic Confession also sets forth a third mark – the exercise of church discipline for correcting and punishing sins.
- c) The claim that “*among the churches there are other articles of doctrine disputed which still do not break the unity of faith*” does not prove that the matters we have brought are not essential.
- d) Calvin correctly states that “*that a difference of opinion over ... nonessential matters should in no wise be the basis of schism among Christians.*” What the delegates neglect by the use of this quotation is that the church has taken the trouble to summarize essential scriptural doctrines in the reformed confessions and safeguarded these doctrines through the use of the adopted Form of Subscription by having officebearers subscribe to the confessions of the church.
- e) Therefore Calvin also correctly states that “*I would not support even the slightest errors with the thought of fostering them through flattery and connivance.*” The history of the last 400 years, with its sequence of deformations and reformations, has shown what happens when unscriptural doctrine begins to take root in the church.
- f) Calvin also correctly states that, “*we must not thoughtlessly forsake the church because of any petty dissensions.*” The CanRCs did not believe that the secessions from the OPC in Blue Bell and Laurel in 1986 and 1987 were the result of any “*petty dissensions.*” As these secessions occurred for the very same reasons that occurred in Abbotsford, it is clear that the secession in Abbotsford was neither “*thoughtless*” nor “*petty.*”

In addition, the secession which occurred in Abbotsford, as confirmed by the Acts of Synod Dunnville, Article 119, is a federative matter. It is therefore no less significant to the CanRCs than the secessions in Blue Bell and Laurel were.

Synods should recognize that we have placed our material before them with the goal of reforming the church and restoring the unity that used to exist between us. If, as Synod states in this Article, the relationship that the DGK has with the LRCA is an impediment to closer contact with the CanRC, then it must also be true that Synod 2013 and Synod 2016's refusal to deal with the material we have placed before it is a *"thoughtless forsaking of the church because of a petty dissension."*

- g) If it is true that in the CanRC *"is kept safe and uncorrupted that doctrine in which piety stands sound and the use of the sacraments ordained by the Lord is guarded"* then we would indeed have no cause to secede. However, as we have shown, the consistories' acceptance of the General Synod decisions, that we have appealed, has rendered such guarding inoperative in the CanRC.
- 5) Since 2001 much more deformation has occurred in the CanRC, which either has been unsuccessfully appealed or accepted without question in the churches. Examples of such decisions include the following:
- a) Limitation of the right of appeal: Synod 2004, Article 20, was an answer to two churches which appealed a decision of the previous general synod to declare inadmissible letters and appeals which has been sent directly to that body. Synod gave the reason for this decision by stating that the major assemblies do not serve as discussion partners for individuals but for the churches (see consideration 4.6). As previously stated above, this is incorrect. It is not the churches that set the agenda of the major assemblies, but Christ. Further, no decision can be considered settled and binding that is contrary to the Word of God or the Church Order. As we read in Micah 6:8, *"He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?"*
  - b) Entering into ecclesiastical fellowship with the RCNZ: Synod 2007, Article 66, entered into ecclesiastical fellowship with the RCNZ without resolving divergencies between the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Confession and their impact on confessional membership, the supervision of the Lord's Supper, and the supervision of the pulpit, as well as their sister relationship with the Christian Reformed Church of Australia to which the Free Reformed Churches of Australia had expressed their objections.
  - c) Entering into ecclesiastical fellowship with the ERQ: Synod 2007, Article 75, entered into ecclesiastical fellowship with the ERQ without resolving divergencies between the Three Forms of Unity

and the Westminster Confession and their impact on confessional membership, the supervision of the Lord's Supper, and the supervision of the pulpit, as well having the office of deacon open to women.

- d) Instructing the Committee for Contact with Churches in the Americas to seek membership in the North American Reformed and Presbyterian Council (NAPARC): Synod 2007, Article 140's decision to seek this membership and the subsequent acceptance of this membership in NAPARC, with its inclusiveness of churches with which the CanRC does not share unity of faith, is a promotion of an unscriptural pluriformity of the church and a denial of Articles 27, 28 and 29 of the Belgic Confession.
- e) Denial of request for sister church relations with the DGK (also known as the GKH): Synod 2007, Article 143 rejected a request for sister church relations with a federation of churches which had clearly liberated themselves from unscriptural doctrines and practices which had taken root in your sister churches in the Netherlands, the Gereformeerde Kerken Vrijgemaakte (GKV), over the preceding 11 years. Instead Synod 2007 called this liberation an "*unlawful separation*" and referred to this liberation as "*schism*."

At the same time this Synod endorsed the report of the Committee for Relations with Churches Abroad which had concluded "*that the GKN (GKV) had remained faithful*" (Consideration 4.1). None of the concerns raised by the DGK (see Observation 3.5) were taken seriously by Synod.

- f) Decisions to permit the practice of women voting: Synod 2010, Article 176, and Synod 2016, Article 87, permitted the practice of women voting, subject to local regulations as determined by the consistory with the deacons, despite the following problems:
  - i) these decisions do not consider the principle of headship that is found in Scripture (see 1 Corinthians 14:34-35);
  - ii) these decisions do not consider the fact that voting is an act of government;
  - iii) these decisions do not consider what previous general synod decisions have been on this matter; and
  - iv) these decisions impose a double standard on the women in the church, some of whom may be allowed to vote and others not.
- g) Bypassing of the ecclesiastical assemblies: Recent publications in the federation's magazine *Clarion* have highlighted significant differences in the interpretation of Scripture, the reformed confessions, and the Church Order on the question of permitting

baptist ministers on CanRC pulpits and admitting baptists to CanRC Lord's Supper celebrations (see discussions between Rev. B. deJong and Dr. J. van Vliet in *Clarion*, the November 2, 2018 issue, the February 22, 2019 issue and the March 8, 2019 issue). Rather than making use of the ecclesiastical assemblies to settle these questions and restore the operation of the Church Order in the federation, concerned members now resort to the press.

Proof of the fact that baptist ministers have been permitted on the pulpits and that baptists have been permitted at the Lord's Supper celebrations at the CanRC's sister churches, the OPC and the URC, can be found in an article by Neal Hegeman in *Christian Renewal*, January 27, 2010 issue, p. 14-15 and a response by Mark Brooks in the April 14, 2010 issue, pp. 5 and 7 (see attached Appendix A). These discussions supply the evidence that the confessional and church orderly standards that guarded access to the pulpit and the Lord's Supper in the CanRC have given way as a result of the decisions by Synod 2001 to establish sister church relationships with the OPC and the URC.

- 6) It should be noted that even your sister churches, the GKV, have admitted a letter from our sister churches, the DGK, calling them to repent from unscriptural general synod decisions. They admitted this material in the hope of reconciling the breach. Although regrettably they did not do justice to the material they received, they, in this instance, gave the impression that they were concerned for the unity of the church of Christ. The evidence given by the responses to our letters shows that this concern does not live in the CanRC. We cannot understand why the CanRC would not at least do what the GKV has done. It is inexplicable that the CanRC would not make a serious attempt at reconciliation and deal with a serious call for reformation of the church!

## Requests

On the basis of the above Considerations, as well as the Considerations we have included in the letters we have attached as Appendices to this Appeal, we hereby request that General Synod:

- 1) determine that General Synods Carman West 2013 and Dunnville 2016 erred by inappropriately declaring our letters inadmissible;
- 2) admit our letters dated February 25, 2016 and February 28, 2013 (attached as Appendices B and C to this letter) to which the above considerations can be added; and

- 3) respond to the request contained in our February 28, 2013 letter *"to return to obedience to God's Word, to the confessional basis as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity,"* and *"to restore the unity which was broken ...."*

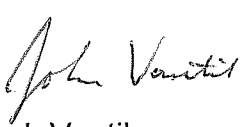
We would appreciate your written response to the above considerations and requests. In the event that you do not agree with any of the above considerations and requests, we would appreciate receiving a detailed response based on Scripture, Confession and Church Order.

We sincerely hope and pray that these very serious concerns will be resolved to the benefit of His Church. We wish you all the Lord's blessing upon your deliberations.

Yours in His service,



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